

APR 13 1948

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THE INCAS





The Americas
A Continent of Friendly Nations

THE INCAS

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PAN AMERICAN UNION

WASHINGTON, D. C.

1942

(Third Printing, 1947)

Special acknowledgement to Beatrice Newhall of the Pan American Union



To make more farm land, the Incas terraced the mountainsides

FAR to the south, long ago, lay the rich empire of the Incas. It was old, perhaps four hundred years or more, when Columbus came to America. Many different legends tell the story of its beginning.

According to one of these legends, from an island in Lake Titicaca, far up in the Andes highlands, the Sun God had sent his two children to conquer the savage tribes, to rule them and to teach them. The son of the Sun was Manco Capac. With him went his sister Mama Ocllo, who was also his wife. In those days no one was thought worthy to marry the son of the Sun, except one of his own family.

When they set out, Manco Capac carried a golden rod. Now and then he stopped and tried to plunge it into the earth. For at the spot where it would enter the ground, there they would stay. Along the shores of the lake, over mountains, through deep valleys and across broad plains they traveled. At last, they reached a spot where the rod sank into the ground and was never seen again. There they remained.

That is the story according to legend. What actually happened, no one knows for certain. Many people believe that at first the Incas were not a united people, but a small tribe of poor shepherds living on a highland plain. From this place they moved into the lovely valley of Cuzco. They convinced the people living there that their leader was the son of the Sun sent to govern them.

Gradually, they conquered more of the tribes from surrounding valleys, highlands and coast, and united them into a vast empire. Inca land included what is now Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador and parts of Argentina and Chile. In the center of the empire rose Cuzco, its capital, and the sacred city of the Sun. In the language of the Incas, Cuzco meant navel or center, and to them it was the center of the whole world, for they knew of no other beyond their own empire.



Stones for buildings were fitted by grinding and polishing

From the Sacred Square in the center of the capital, four great roads led out to the four provinces that made up the empire. So sacred was the capital city that when travelers met on the road, those from Cuzco were given right of way. Within the city, the streets were always crowded with people going and coming. Caravans of llamas arrived loaded with products from distant parts of the empire—great bags of grain, chests of gold and

silver, hundreds of yards of finely woven cloth and bundles of fresh, green coca leaves. Now and then runners hurried through the crowded streets bringing news from the farthest corner of the empire. Others left to carry messages from the emperor to his people.

The Inca rulers were stern but able and just. As one after another of the surrounding tribes were conquered, they became part of the empire. Conquered nobles were made government officials, and the people who had worked under them were given the same positions they had held before. Conquered people were permitted to celebrate their festivals and to follow the customs they had always observed. Sometimes the Inca moved entire tribes to another part of the empire so that they could learn the ways of the Incas from their new neighbors. And sometimes he sent some of his own people into the newly conquered territory to teach the language and the customs of the rulers.

Thus, the empire came to contain many different tribes. But, it was easy to tell by a person's headdress where he came from. Some wore caps of wool; some had headpieces of short ropes with longer strands which hung to the knees. Others wore hats that looked like a little sieve and covered only the crown of the head. The Inca himself wore a fringe of many colors, called *llantu*, for a headdress. This was wound several times around the head and the ends left hanging.

Throughout the empire the people were divided into groups of ten families. The head of one of the families was chosen as leader to supervise his own and the other nine families. He, in turn, was responsible to another leader or captain who had fifty families under him, and so on up to the Inca himself, who was the final authority over all. The captain of each group helped the people supply their needs and kept order in the group. If he delayed in reporting any wrong-doing within the group, he was punished twice—once because he had neglected his duty, and a second time



Llamas carry burdens and furnish wool for cloth



Balsa boats on Lake Titicaca

because by keeping silent he himself became guilty of the offense. Likewise, if a child was naughty the father was punished along with the child because he had not trained it better.

Within the empire, all except the very young and the old worked. To the Incas, old age meant fifty years or over. No one was idle. No one wasted food or clothing or time. The lazy, of whom there were few, were called *Misqui-tullu*, which means "sweet bones." Dishonesty, like idleness, was severely punished. And as a reminder not to fall into these bad habits, travelers on the road greeted each other with the words, "Not idle. Not a cheat. Not a thief."

The farm land in the empire was divided into three parts. One part was for the Sun, one for the Inca, and a third was divided among the people each year to be cultivated for their own needs. The amount of land each family received depended on the number to be fed. If the family increased, it received more land than the previous year. If it decreased, it received less. Instead of paying taxes in money or goods,

the people paid it in work. The principal task was to cultivate the crops on the lands of the Inca and of the Sun.

In addition to tilling the soil, each family wove its own cloth and made the shoes or sandals and the pottery dishes it used. Just as the land was divided, so wool and cotton yarn, leather and clay were distributed among the families and each given a certain amount of work to complete. When that was done, they made clothing for the soldiers, and for the old or sick. The Inca did not believe that being deaf and dumb was sufficient reason for being idle and they were also obliged to work.

Only the Inca and people of royal blood traveled about the empire for pleasure. Traders, messengers and officials were allowed to travel because it was part of their work. Everyone else stayed at home. Families lived in the same village, and usually the same house, where their forefathers had lived, and where their own children would live after them. They never changed their occupations or worked up to something better. The peasant boy never could become emperor, but remained where he was born.

Everything about the people's lives was decided for them by the Inca—what clothes they wore, what food they ate, what work they did or holidays they celebrated, and even how they cut their hair. It was a very strict system of government, with no



Indian with a quipu or knotted cord

opportunity for personal freedom. But it had its advantages, too. There was no unemployment. No one starved. The sick, the poor and the old were cared for. If there was a crop failure, the people were fed from the great storehouses filled with food for such an emergency.

The people were excellent farmers. Although much of the land was very poor, they made the most of every corner of the vast empire. In order to make more land, they terraced the mountainsides. First they built strong retaining walls eight to fourteen feet high and three to four feet wide. Then they filled baskets with soil from the valley, carried them up the steep slopes and filled in the terraces. It was hard work. But even in building the walls, they showed the patience and the painstaking effort of the true craftsman. The stones were carefully fitted together to leave no space between, and the soil was carefully packed and smoothed. Sometimes the valleys were also terraced to make more

space for the growing of crops. The Incas built great aqueducts and brought mountain streams down to irrigate the fields. Any man who neglected to water his crops was punished by being struck across the shoulders with a stone.

The Incas had excellent engineers and architects. Many of the buildings and walls they erected centuries ago still stand today. Stones weighing as much as a ton were used in some



Design on water jar



An ancient Peruvian fortress—Machu Picchu

of them. Although they had no machines, they had wonderful skill, patience and a plentiful supply of labor. They had neither cement nor mortar, but they spent a long time polishing and grinding the stones with sand and water to make them fit together. So well did they succeed, that not even the blade of a knife could be pushed between the stones. "A hole that sees," was the Incas' name for a window.

Loveliest of all the buildings in the capital city was the Temple of the Sun. Its walls were covered with plates and slabs of gold. A large figure of the Sun made of gold plate covered one wall of the temple. Whenever an Inca died his mummy was seated on a golden chair and placed at the side of the image of the Sun. Within the temple were five fountains of water. The pipes were of gold, as were some of the pillars. A strip of gold more than a yard wide covered the upper part of the outside wall. The doors, too, were coated with gold. The garden surrounding the Temple was terraced down to the water. Models of all the plants, animals, birds and insects found in the empire were fashioned of gold and placed in the garden. Beyond the Temple of the Sun were



Water jar

smaller buildings dedicated to the moon, the stars, thunder, lightning and the rainbow.

Like the temples, the palaces and the homes of the people of royal blood were beautifully built and richly decorated. The homes of the peasants were humble huts of adobe, thatched with straw. Yet these, too, were well made. Often the thatch was so skillfully placed that it looked like the stone roofs of the houses of the wealthy.

Engineers built excellent roads which led out from the capital to all parts of the empire. At intervals along the highways were rest houses where travelers might spend the night. Enormous storehouses built along the roads contained provisions for the armies when they were moved from one part of the country to another. One of the most remarkable things the engineers constructed was the bridges that spanned dizzy chasms in the highlands or crossed churning rivers. Immense quantities of vines or of willow branches were collected. Long strands the length of the bridge were selected and in sets of three were braided into a rope containing nine strands. Three of these were then braided to make a rope of twenty-seven strands. As the braiding continued, the number of strands was increased and when it was finished the rope or cable was as large as a man's body. Five of these were made. When they were ready, a small rope was tied to the end of the cable. An Indian holding an end of this small



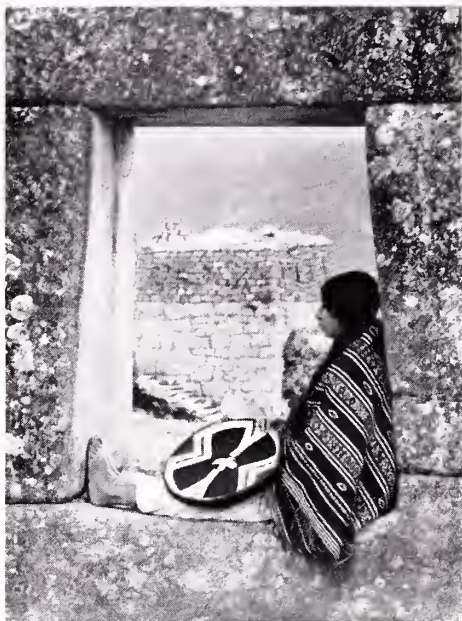
Walls built hundreds of years ago

rope swam across the river. On the other side, strong men seized the rope and drew the heavy cable across.

High buttresses cut of solid rock and hollow within were placed on the bank. Five or six beams were fastened inside. Over these the huge cables were secured to keep the bridge taut. Despite this, however, they sloped toward the center,



Roads led to all parts of the Inca empire



A sample of fine weaving

and those crossing had to go down toward the middle of the bridge and up to the opposite end. Three of the cables formed the floor of the bridge. Small cross pieces were placed on the strands in the floor, like hurdles, for the entire length of the bridge to help preserve the cables. Many boughs placed in rows over the laths made a firm footing for animals. The largest of these bridges was two hundred paces long and five and a half wide.

They were repaired each year, and anyone who damaged a bridge was severely punished. Still other types of bridges, made of bundles of osiers laced together with strands of a creeping vine, were used on rivers. These were floating bridges.

Among the Incas were fine weavers and skilled potters. Nowhere in the world have more beautiful textiles been made than in Peru. Woven of fine cotton thread, some were mistaken for silk by the Spaniards. Coarse cloth was woven of yarn made from the wool of the llama and huanaco. But the wool of the alpaca and vicuna was used to make the very fine clothing worn by the Inca, the royal family and the nobility. They also made lovely garments of feather work.

In the designs of their textiles as well as the decorations of their pottery, the Incas and some of the tribes they conquered have left much of the story of their everyday life. There are the fruits and vegetables and many other plants

they grew. Animals, birds and insects form some designs. Others show people at their work—planting the crops and harvesting them, hunting and fishing. There are proud nobles traveling in chairs borne on the shoulders of strong men. Other designs show the people at their festivals, dancing and playing musical instruments. Pieces of pottery have been found which record all the steps in weaving. Another piece has an amusing

decoration in which a man is drinking from a cup while a monkey perches on his shoulder. Perhaps the most interesting pottery was the vases made in the shape of human heads,



Head of a soldier



The bath of the Virgin of the Sun

called portrait vases. Some of the people are old, some young. Some seem happy, some sad or cross, some proud or humble.

The children of the nobles were educated to fill some public office or practice a profession. Back of the Sacred Square in Cuzco stood the House of Learning. Classes were taught by priests, who trained the students in law, government, science, religion, poetry, music and chronicles of the heroes. They also taught them how to read the *quipus*, the knotted cords that the Incas used for counting and keeping records. They added and multiplied by these knots and separated the records of different villages by kernels of corn or tiny pebbles. The color as well as the knots had a meaning. A red thread tied above a knot meant war, and a white one meant peace. Children of the common people were not taught the sciences, for the Inca was afraid if they were given a higher education they might become proud and ambitious. So they were taught the occupations of their fathers—farming, weaving, pottery-making and other crafts.

The Incas were excellent surgeons, and skulls have been found which show that skillful operations had been performed on them. The doctors knew the uses of many herbs and roots in curing sickness. There were also good dentists among them.

Although the Inca kept his people hard at work, there were also festivals and holidays. Each month there were three holidays and three market days. But even in the matter of holidays, the people had no choice. Just as they had been forced to work, so they were also obliged to play. If an ambitious person wished to stay at home and work, he was not allowed to do it. Because their lives depended upon the crops they raised, many of their festivals were connected with planting and harvesting. They worshipped the sun that sent warmth to the cold highlands and made their fields grow.

Of all the festivals, that of the Sun was the greatest. The central square of the Sacred City was filled with people

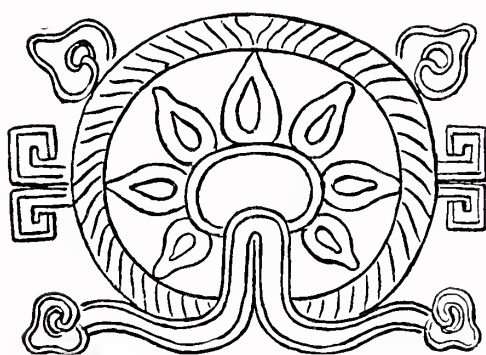
from every corner of the empire. Their costumes of bright colored, finely woven cloth and their robes of shimmering feathers contrasted with the snowwhite robes, girdled with gold, worn by the Virgins of the Sun. The flutes and the measured beat of the drums made music for the dances.

The dead were not forgotten at festivals. Bundles containing mummies of dead Incas and the nobility were brought out and lined up on the platform with the reigning Inca, as though they too were watching the gay scene before them.

A festival to ward off sickness and disease was held at the beginning of rainy season. It lasted for several days, with different ceremonies on each. On the first day, men ran out from the city. And as they ran they shouted, "Go away, all evil." Beyond the city they met others who carried the message until they came to streams in which they bathed. These streams flowed on to the sea and took the evil from the land. In the city, people came to their doors, shook their mantles and called, "Let the evils be gone." On this day, the dogs were driven from the city so that their barking would not disturb people at their prayers.

For many centuries the empire of the Incas increased in size and wealth. Finally it was divided between his Atahualpa and Huascar. The northern part of the empire was to be Atahualpa's while his brother would rule in the south. But Atahualpa seized the entire empire and imprisoned Huascar. So it was that when the Spaniards arrived the empire was divided and weakened.

Years after the Inca empire had been conquered, Garcilasso de la Vega, the son of a Spaniard and an Inca Princess, wrote a book called "The Royal Commentaries of the Incas." Garcilasso knew how to write simply and beautifully. In his book he described the land, the people, the customs and the way of life of the empire of the Incas, destroyed by the Spanish warrior, Francisco Pizarro.





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